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ABSTRACT

A study investigated the diversity of reading behaviors reported by 3,354 middle-aged (45-64) and older (65 and older) Canadian readers in response to a questionnaire on reading habits. The study coupled the amount of time spent reading with a "breadth" score based on the variety and frequency of books read. Based on the subjects' time and breadth scores, four groups were discerned: (1) light-narrow, (2) light-broad, (3) heavy-narrow, and (4) heavy-broad. Readers who selected from a wide variety of books tended to spend more time reading, and those who spent a limited amount of time reading tended to choose from a narrow range of books. It was observed that there was an increase in the time spent reading and a narrowing in the variety of books read as the reader's age increased. Reading breadth increased with education, and women appeared to read more and from a wider range of literature than did men. The results also indicated that heavy-broad readers made greater use of libraries and bookstores than did light-narrow readers and read from habit and for pleasure, while light-narrow readers read only for highly specific information. (HTH)

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READING PATTERNS OF MIDDLE-AGED AND OLDER CANADIAN BOOK-READERS

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Reading Patterns of Middle-aged and Older

Canadian Book-Readers

This exploratory study investigated the diversity of reading behaviours reported by 3,354 middle-aged (45-64) and older (65+) Canadian Book-readers in response to a questionnaire entitled "Survey of Leisure Time Activities: Reading Habits" which was administered by Statistics Canada in February 1978.

Traditionally researchers have classified book-readers either on the basis of number of hours spent reading- *TIME* (e.g. Watson et al, 1980) or on the number of books read (e.g. McEvoy and Vincent, 1980). The present study coupled the amount of time spent reading with a *BREADTH* score based on the variety and frequency of books read. The relationship between the subjects' *READING TIME* and *READING BREADTH* was identified as *PERSONAL READING EMPHASIS*. By performing a double median split on the subjects' *TIME* and *BREADTH* scores, four *PERSONAL READING EMPHASIS* groups were created. These were identified as (1) Light-narrow readers, (2) Light-broad readers, (3) Heavy-narrow, and (4) Heavy-broad readers. (McLeod and Kelleher, 1981). To examine relationships between Personal Reading Emphasis and selected socio-demographic variables (age, gender, education, and occupation) and reading behaviours (sources of books, reasons for reading, and positive and negative influences) chi square analyses were carried out. Analysis of variance was used to examine the relationships between Personal Reading Emphasis and the time spent on selected leisure time activities.

When the four Personal Reading Emphasis groups were created, it was found that the measures of *TIME* and *BREADTH* were related (= 100.6, df=1; p=.001). Book-readers who select from a broad variety of books tend to spend more time reading, and conversely, those who spend a limited amount of time reading tend to do so from a narrow range of books. However, the reality of what might be best described as mixed reading emphasis groups was confirmed also.

The four reading emphasis groups were observed across the age cohorts, both genders, three occupations, and three levels of education. It was observed that:

- as book-readers grow older they tend to be found in the Heavy-narrow and heavy-broad categories. There is clearly an increase in the time spent reading with a general narrowing in the variety of books read.

- reading *BREADTH* increases with higher education (gr. 0-8 = 35%; 9-12= 57%; Univ.= 67%) which also results in an increased *TIME* spent reading. This influence of education appears to offset the narrowing affect of age.
- women were found more frequently than expected in the Heavy-broad reader category, while men were observed more often than expected in the Light-narrow category.
- occupation and personal reading emphasis do appear to be significantly related. However, the findings of the present study do not clarify whether this relationship is causative or facilitative in nature.The latter is hypothesized as a valuable avenue for further exploration.
- there appear to be significant differences as to where the four reading emphasis groups obtain their books. Heavy-broad readers make greater use of more sources which include public libraries, purchases, and gifts. Light-narrow readers are least likely to obtain their books from the library, or make bookstore purchases. While Light-broad readers are more likely to buy or borrow the books they read, the Light-narrow reader is least likely to borrow the books (s)he reads.
- the personal reading emphasis groups differ with regard to their reasons for reading. Heavy-broad readers indicate the strong influence of habit,

as well as for recreation and relaxation. Light readers (both Light-narrow and Light-broad) appear to read for general information or because of an interest in a specific subject.

- the personal reading emphasis groups differ in what they perceive to positively or negatively influence their reading behaviours. Significantly more Heavy-broad readers identified as positive influences (1) their families example, (2) availability of books in their childhood homes, and (3) own interest. In contrast, there were no real positive influences identified by the Light-narrow readers. Light-broad readers indicated a strong influence of work on their reading, while Heavy-narrow readers do not seem to be so influenced. Considering factors which negatively influence book reading, Light-narrow readers more often than expected report personal difficulty with reading. Lack of energy and time were the negative factors most often cited by the Light-broad readers. Heavy readers (both Heavy-broad and Heavy-narrow) do not perceive lack of energy to be a significant negative factor.

In sum, these observations underscore the diversity within and among the middle-aged and older Canadian book-readers. They point out as well the complexity of *Personal Reading Emphasis*, and suggest that it is a dynamic concept that is sensitive to a number of socio-demographic variables. Middle-aged and older Canadian book-readers differ not only in degree but also in kind.

Differences between the four reading emphasis groups were observed as well for the average time spent on major leisure/recreational activities. Televiewing ranked number one for all groups. General reading ranked second for the heavy readers (both Heavy-narrow and Heavy-broad), while it was fourth out of the top five for the Light-broad readers and fifth for the Light-narrow readers. Figures 1 to 4 graph the relationships between televiewing and general reading for the four emphasis groups.

The time spent televiewing is greater than the time spent reading across the four age groups for the Light-narrow, Light-broad, and Heavy-narrow emphasis groups. The differences between the two activities is greatest for the Light-narrow book-readers, and least for the Heavy-narrow category. The Heavy-broad book-readers reveal a strikingly different pattern from the other three groups. While reported time for televiewing is greater than reading time for the middle-aged cohorts, this relationship is reversed for the older book-readers in this group, and reading time exceeds televiewing. It may be that these Heavy-broad readers who find enjoyment in books realize that print offers an alternative to the explicit sex and violence currently found on television. Print allows for greater personal control of the topics and ideas one entertains during one's leisure time. Alternate choices in books exceed the selection of television offerings which do not seem to match the interests of the older reader as reported by Romani (1973) and others (Wolf, 1979, and Kingston, 1979). Clearly there are not only difference of degree within and among groups, but also differences of priority between the reading emphasis groups identified. It is, indeed simplistic to classify all book readers in one global book-reader category

Book reading is a learned human behaviour. As such, book-reading behaviours are as complex and dynamic as human nature itself. This examination of personal reading emphasis has demonstrated significant diversity between and among middle-aged and older Canadian book-readers. The implications of this diversity need to considered not only by book suppliers (libraries and book stores) but also by educators (parents and teachers), as well as governmental and community agencies. As Canada's population shifts into the middle-aged and older categories with a projected three and a half million over the age of 65 by the turn of this century, more research into the concept of personal reading emphasis is needed if we are

to appreciate more sensitively the older mature book-reader, and effectively and efficiently plan to help each person enhance his own book reading to the limits of his interest and potential.

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BROAD—HEAVY BOOK READERS

1. Read a variety of fiction and non-fiction books
2. Average 9 hours book reading per week
3. Obtain books from a variety of sources including Public Library, bookstores, gifts, and borrowings from friends/family
4. Perceive both recreational and informational values of books
5. Perceive habits and own interests as significant positive factors in leisure reading
6. Perceive family example and availability of books in childhood home as significant shapers of personal reading emphasis
7. General reading ranks 2nd major leisure activity out of top 5

NARROW—HEAVY BOOK READERS

1. Read from a selective narrow range of fiction and/or non-fiction books
2. Average 9 hours book reading per week
3. Obtain most books at public library, bookstores, or other commercial outlets; less likely to read borrowed books
4. Perceive recreational value of book reading as particularly significant
5. Much less likely to read books for personal development or to select books related to work
6. Availability of books in childhood home is not viewed as a significant factor in personal reading emphasis
7. General reading ranks 2nd major leisure activity out of top 5

MIDDLE AGED AND OLDER CANADIAN BOOK READERS

BROAD—LIGHT BOOK READERS

1. Read a variety of fiction and non-fiction books
2. Average less than 1 hour book reading per week
3. Are most likely to purchase books from bookstores or other commercial outlets, or borrow them from friends or family
4. Most likely to read books for general information, personal development, or because of interest in the subject
5. Perceive own interest, and newspaper and magazine reading as major positive influences in personal reading
6. Cite lack of time and energy as major deterrents to book reading
7. General reading ranks as 4th major leisure activity out of top 5

NARROW—LIGHT BOOK READERS

1. Read from a narrow restricted range of fiction and/or non-fiction books
2. Average less than 1 hour book reading per week
3. Are most likely to read a book which is borrowed or a gift. Least likely to use the public library or purchase books
4. Perceive book reading as a very functional information providing activity
5. Do not perceive family example and availability of books in childhood home as positive influences on their personal reading
6. Identify reading difficulty as major deterrent to book reading
7. General reading ranks 5th out of the 5 top leisure activities

FIGURE 1

Televiewing and General Reading
by the Light-Narrow Book-Reader

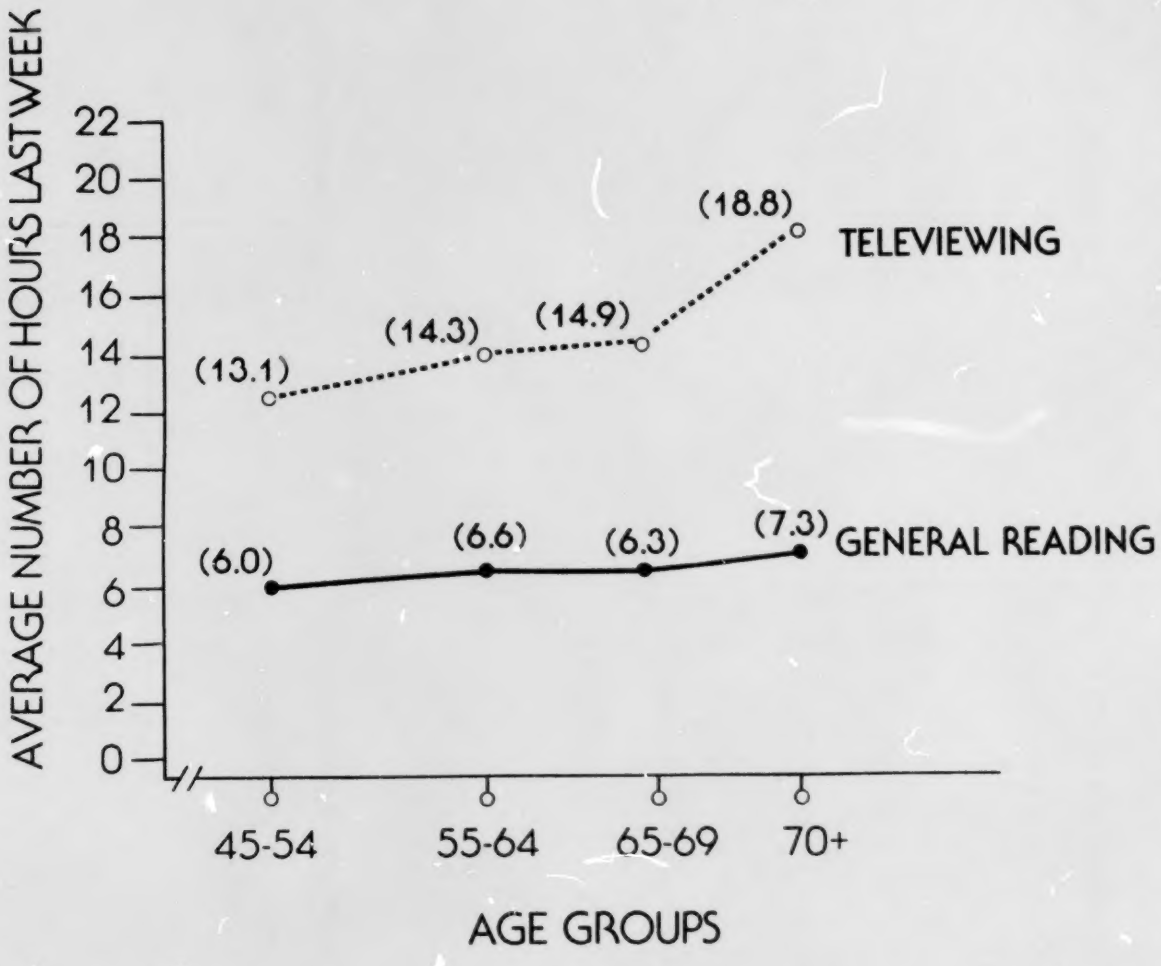

FIGURE 2

Televiewing and General Reading

by the Light-Broad Book-Reader

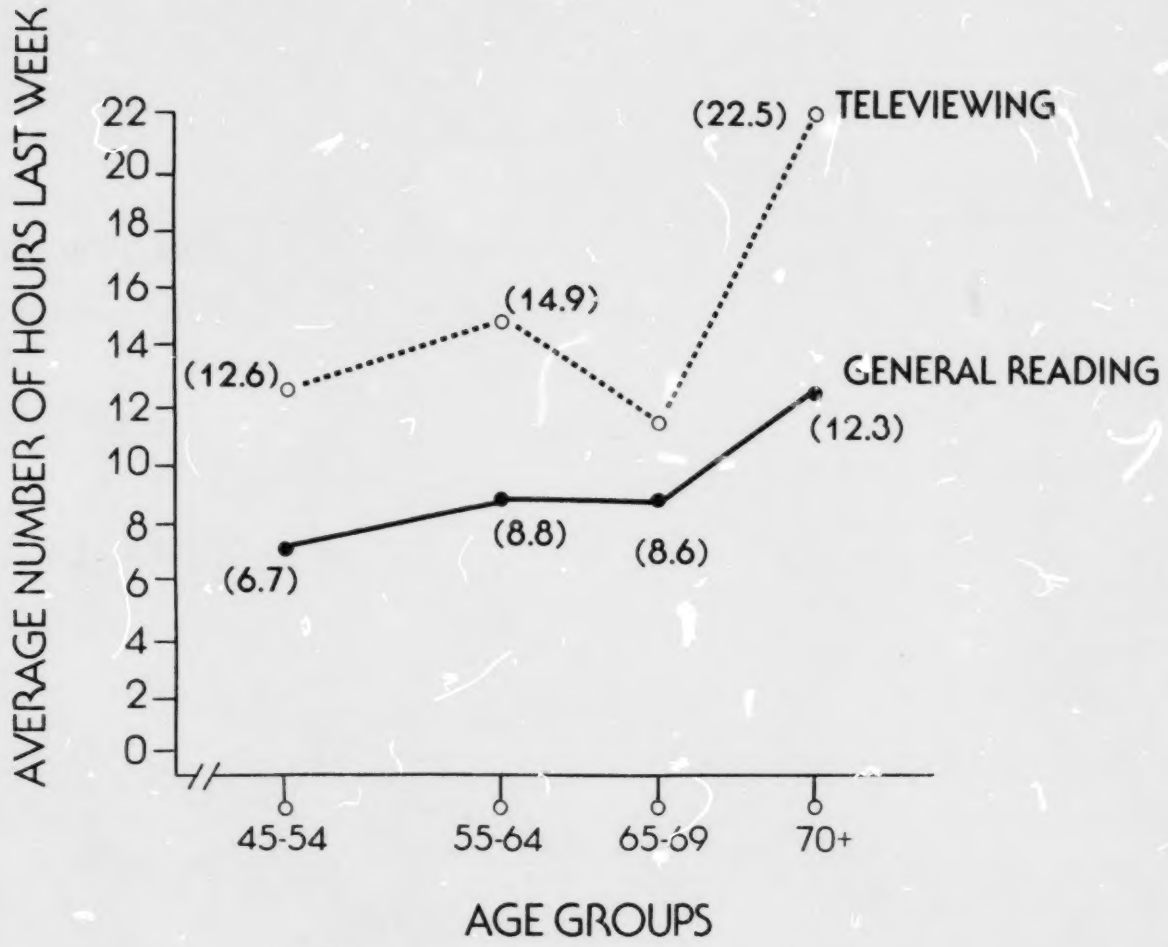

FIGURE 3

Televiewing and General Reading
by the Heavy-Narrow Book-Reader

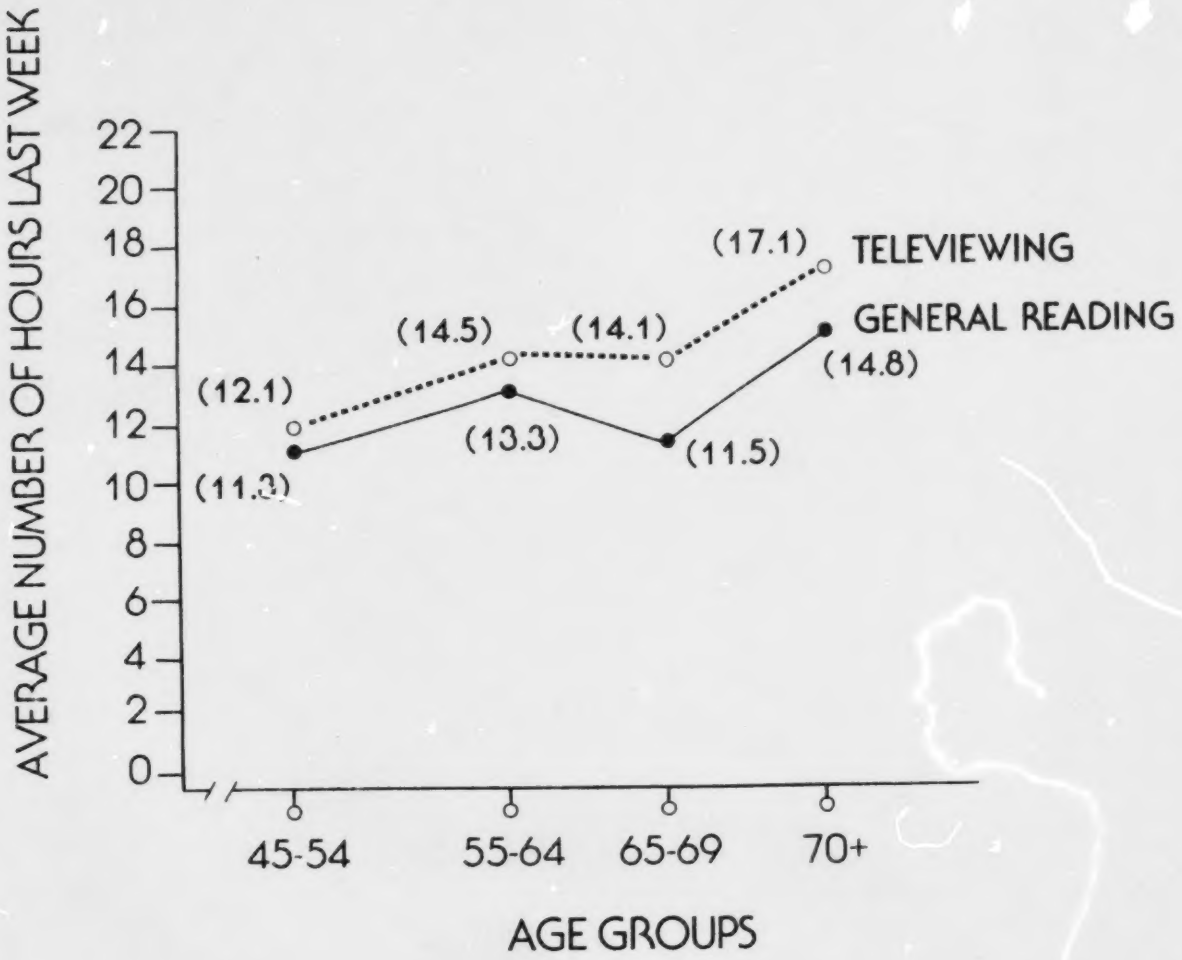

FIGURE 4

Televiewing and General Reading

by the Heavy-Broad Book-Reader